



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Nov 15, 2013

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World Prematurity Day Recognized on November 17

BISMARCK, N.D. – The March of Dimes and North Dakota Department of Health are working to increase awareness about the impact of premature births, the risk factors involved and how to improve birth outcomes, as part of World Prematurity Day on November 17, 2013.

Prematurity is the leading cause of death for newborns. Every year, more than half a million babies are born prematurely in United States. Births prior to 37 weeks gestation are considered preterm and cost society \$26 billion annually. Maternal risk factors that may result in premature birth include late or no prenatal care; decreased or advanced maternal age; low socioeconomic status; previous preterm birth; multiple pregnancy; infection or high blood pressure during pregnancy; tobacco, alcohol or illicit drug usage; and chronic stress.

The complications of being born four to six weeks early are significant, since one-third of brain growth and development occurs in the last five weeks of pregnancy. Infants who survive prematurity often have lifelong health complications, which may include an increased risk for birth defects, respiratory problems, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, blindness, hearing loss and other chronic health problems.

The goals of World Prematurity Day are to reduce the rate of premature birth and encourage public awareness about the problem of premature birth. “The March of Dimes grades North Dakota a B on the prematurity report card,” said Karin Roseland, State Director of the March of Dimes North Dakota Chapter. Since 2006, North Dakota’s preterm birth rate has decreased from 12.1 to 9.9 percent.”

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The March of Dimes premature birth report card measures three selected contributing factors: uninsured women, women who smoke and late preterm births (34-36 weeks gestation). While these important and potentially modifiable risk factors represent prevention opportunities, they do not represent an exhaustive list of contributing factors to preterm birth.

“Although our rate of preterm births has improved in recent years, we must do more to ensure a healthy birth for the babies of North Dakota. Partnerships with our state health officials and local hospitals have helped us make newborn health a priority and lowered our preterm birth rate, making a difference in babies’ lives,” said Moe Bentz, local March of Dimes board member. “We are partnering with the North Dakota Department of Health to ensure more babies are born healthy. Our goal is to reduce premature birth by at least 8 percent between 2009 and 2014.”

According to the March of Dimes 2013 premature birth report card, the rate of North Dakota women ages 18 to 44 who currently smoke is 22.7 percent, which decreased from 24.8 percent in 2012; however, this rate is still above the national average of 20.8 percent. The late preterm birth rate in North Dakota is 7.1 percent, slightly below the national average of 8.1 percent. The rate of uninsured women in North Dakota is 13.8 percent, which is significantly lower than the national average of 21.3 percent. These advances have not only contributed to healthier babies, but have also saved in health care and economic costs to society.

“Preconceptual and prenatal education to women of childbearing age, health-care providers, and communities are a priority as we work toward improving collaborative birth outcomes in North Dakota,” said Joyal Meyer, Director of the Optimal Pregnancy Outcome Program, North Dakota Department of Health. “Improvements are needed to advance access to health care, tobacco cessation and reduce elective inductions or cesarean sections prior to 39 weeks of pregnancy unless medically necessary.”

The March of Dimes and North Dakota Department of Health have joined in efforts that help women to have full-term pregnancies and healthy babies. Their partnership promotes Text4Baby, a free service that sends enrollees three free text messages per week with education relevant to their stage of pregnancy and up to a baby’s first birthday.

For more information about premature births or to join in giving all babies a strong start, contact Jacobson at the March of Dimes North Dakota Chapter by calling 701.235.5530 or e-mailing ND407@marchofdimes.com.

For free help to quit using tobacco, visit <http://www.ndhealth.gov/ndquits> or call 1.800.QUIT.NOW (1.800.784.8669).

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